



US009473675B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Matsumoto

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 9,473,675 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Oct. 18, 2016**

(54) **COLOR CONVERSION PROCESSING APPARATUS, COLOR CONVERSION PROCESSING METHOD, AND NON-TRANSITORY STORAGE MEDIUM**

H04N 11/6055; H04N 11/6058; H04N 11/6061; H04N 11/56; H04N 11/6008; G06K 15/025; G06K 15/1878; G01J 3/463
USPC 358/1.9, 2.1, 500, 504, 515-521, 527, 358/406, 468; 382/162-167
See application file for complete search history.

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

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(21) Appl. No.: **14/508,132**

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(22) Filed: **Oct. 7, 2014**

JP	2006-279091	A	10/2006
JP	2010-11048	A	1/2010
JP	4803048	B2	10/2011

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2015/0098099 A1 Apr. 9, 2015

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(30) **Foreign Application Priority Data**

Oct. 8, 2013 (JP) 2013-210842

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(51) **Int. Cl.**

H04N 1/40	(2006.01)
H04N 1/60	(2006.01)
G01J 3/46	(2006.01)
G01J 3/52	(2006.01)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A color conversion processing apparatus acquires spot color information, which is capable of defining a spot color with device-dependent color values. The color conversion processing apparatus further acquires a reference profile and an updated profile, and using the spot color information, converts an image signal of a spot color plate into a first image signal of a process color plate. Then, by having the reference profile and the updated profile act successively thereon, the color conversion processing apparatus converts the first image signal into a second image signal of a process color plate.

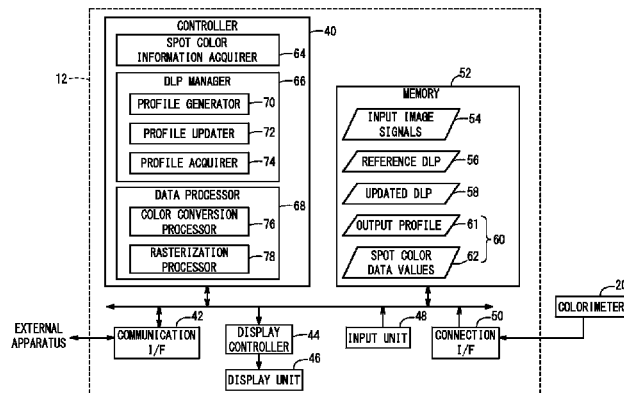
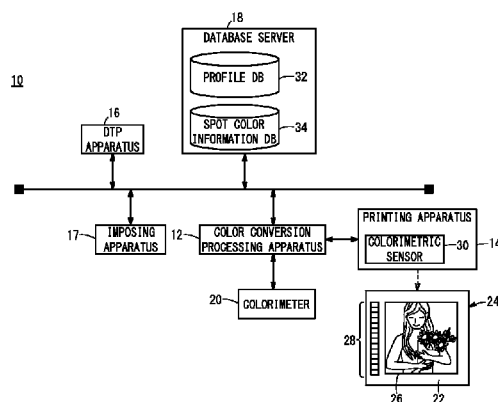
(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC **H04N 1/6008** (2013.01); **G01J 3/462** (2013.01); **G01J 3/524** (2013.01); **H04N 1/603** (2013.01); **H04N 1/6036** (2013.01); **G01J 2003/467** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC .. H04N 1/54; H04N 11/603; H04N 11/6033;

10 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets



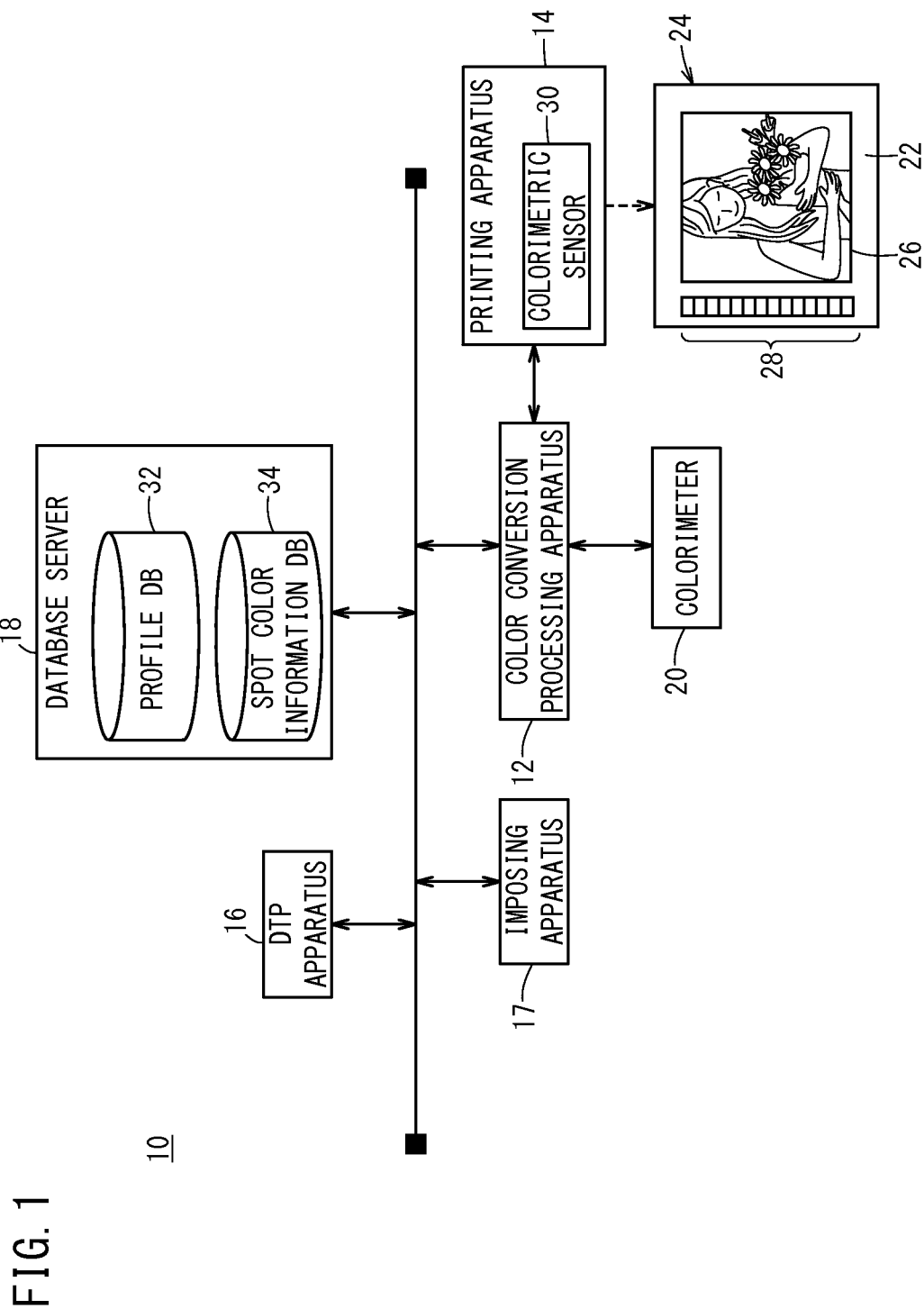


FIG. 2A

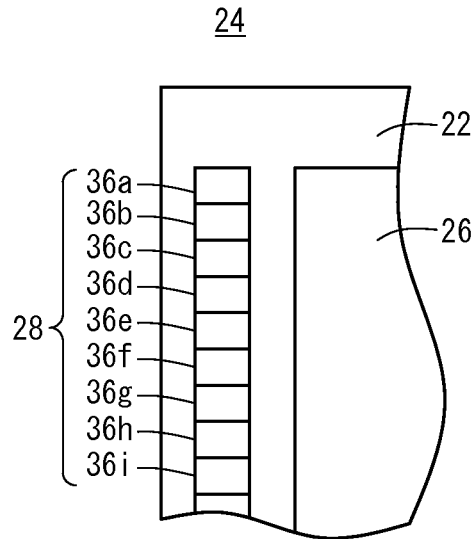


FIG. 2B

COLOR PATCH	COLOR	L*	a*	b*
36a	Paper	93	0	-3
36b	K	16	0	0
36c	C	54	-36	-49
36d	M	46	72	-5
36e	Y	88	-6	90
36f	M+Y	47	66	50
36g	C+Y	49	-66	33
36h	C+M	20	25	-48
36i	C+M+Y	18	3	0

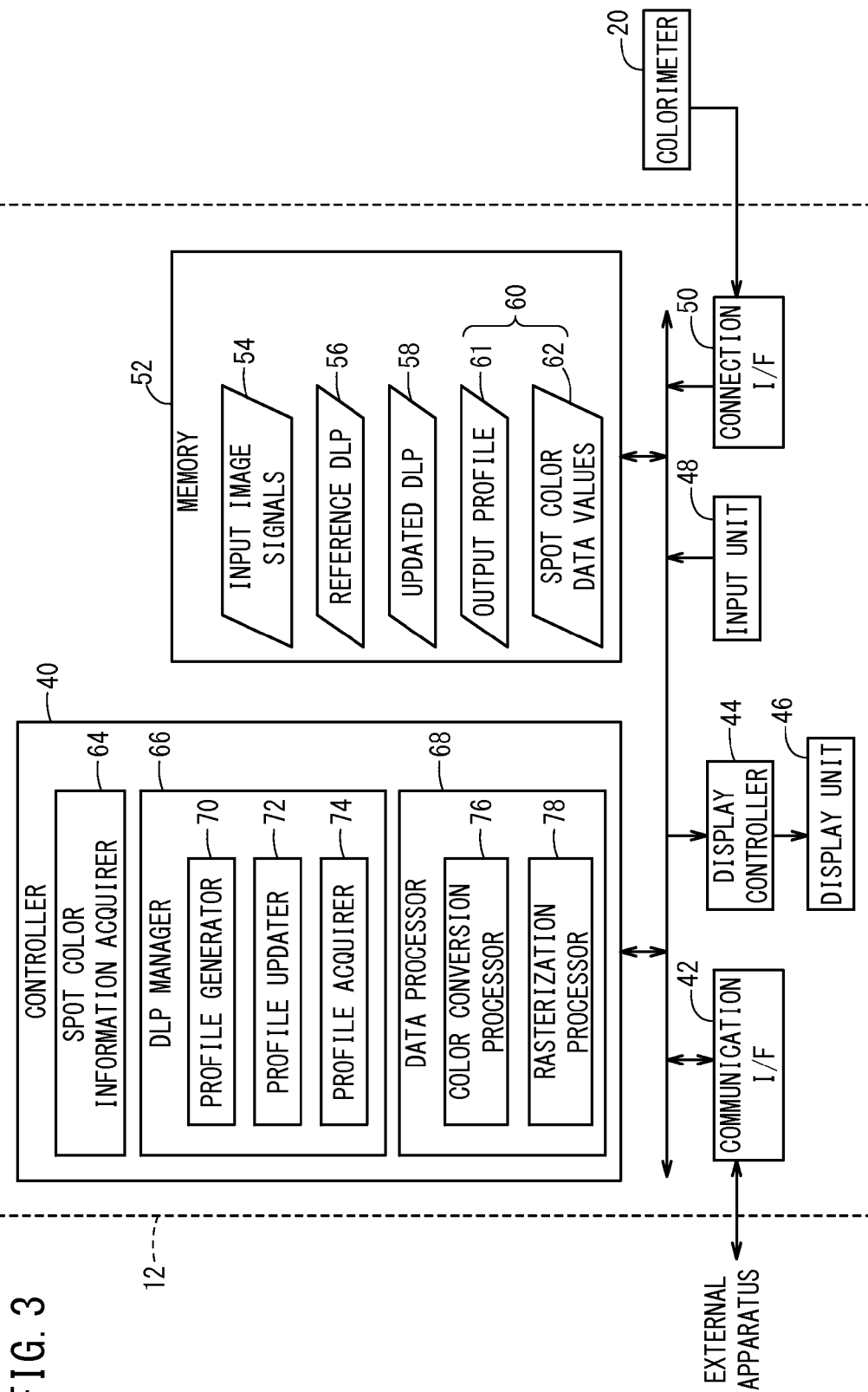


FIG. 4

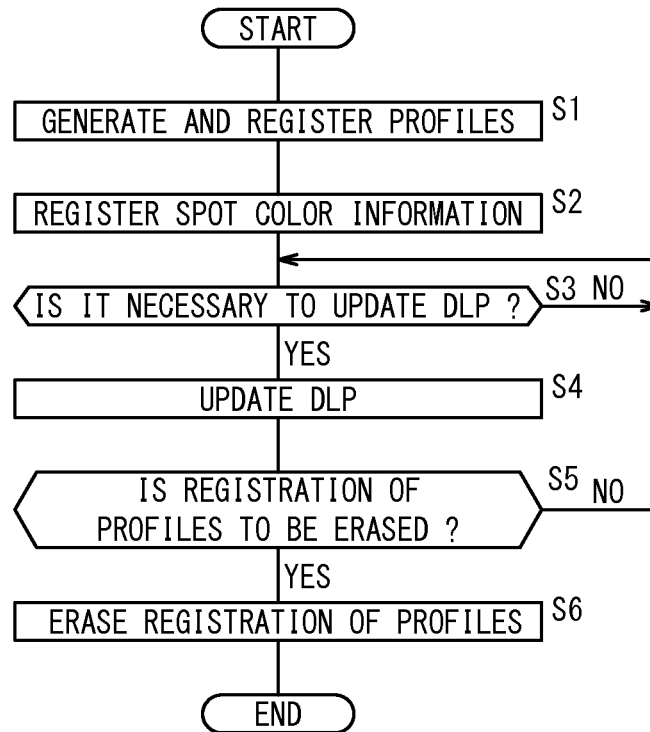


FIG. 5A

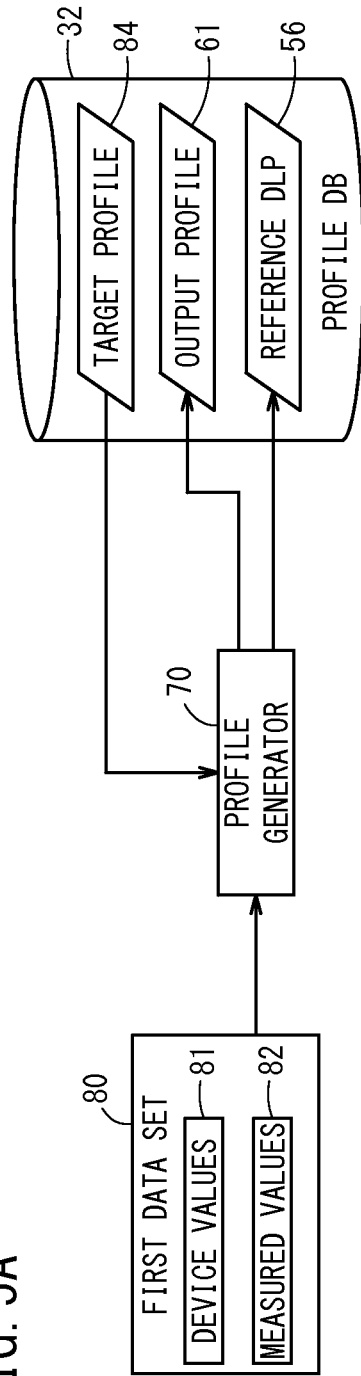


FIG. 5B

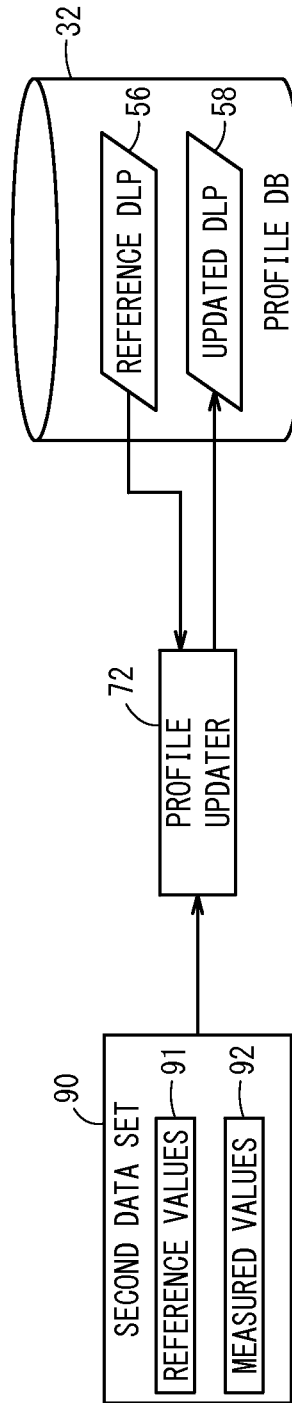


FIG. 6

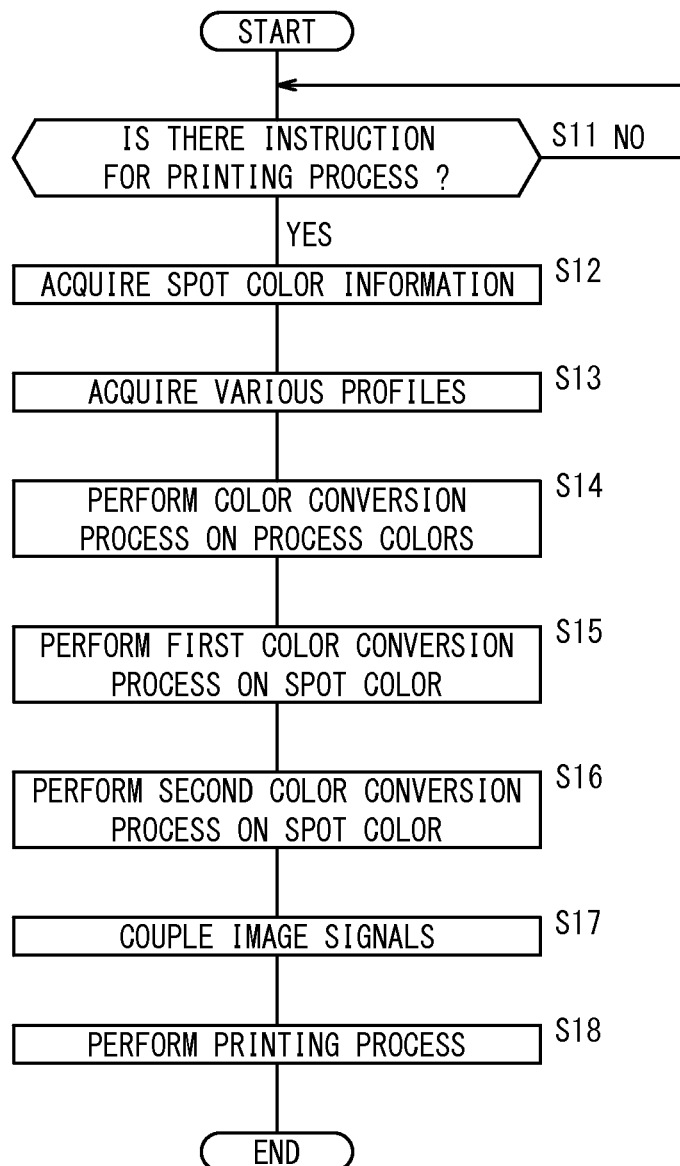
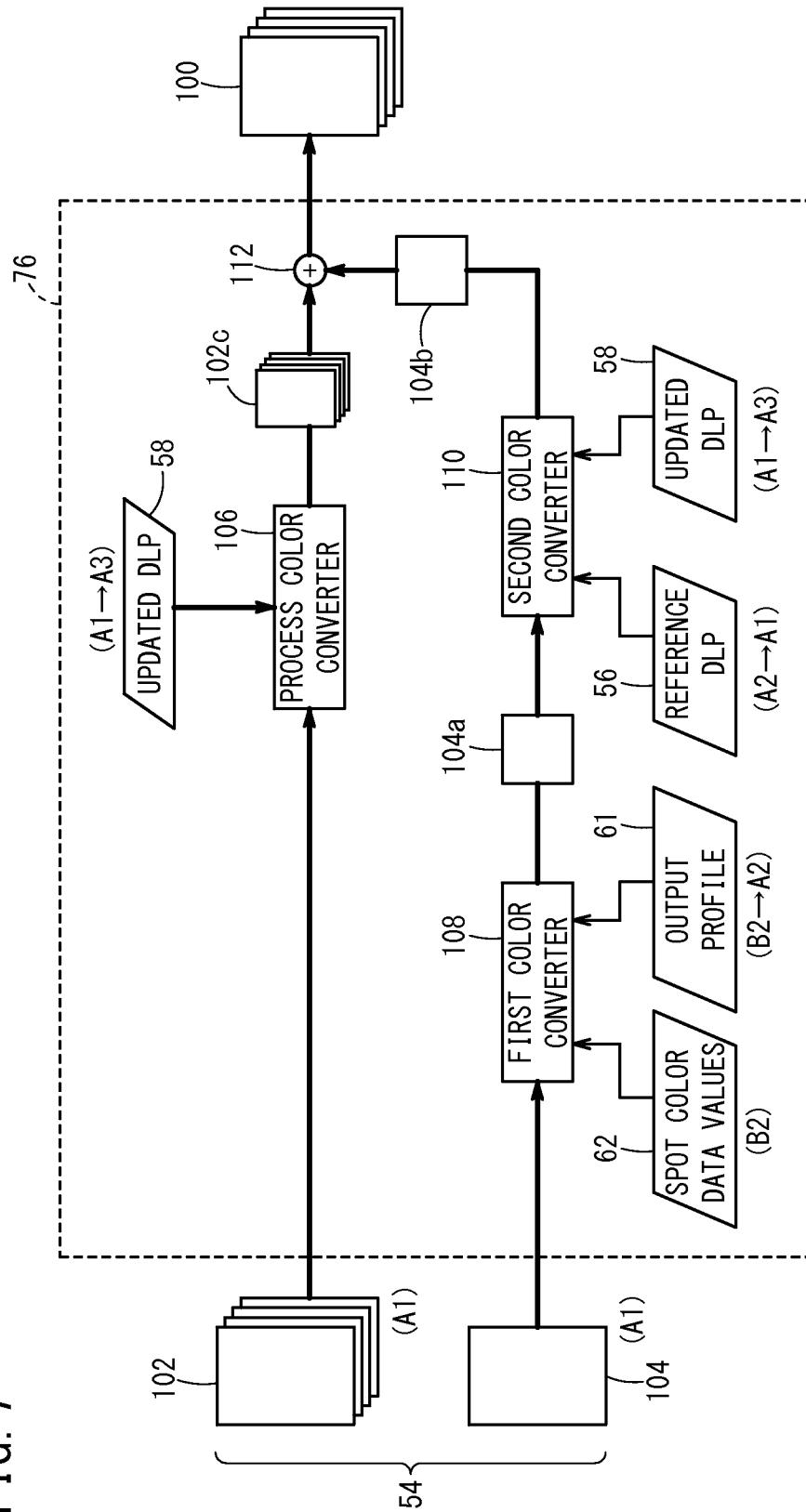


FIG. 7



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**COLOR CONVERSION PROCESSING
APPARATUS, COLOR CONVERSION
PROCESSING METHOD, AND
NON-TRANSITORY STORAGE MEDIUM**

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED
APPLICATION

This application is based upon and claims the benefit of priority from Japanese Patent Application No. 2013-210842 filed on Oct. 8, 2013, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a color conversion processing apparatus and a color conversion processing method for converting input image signals, which are composed of image signals of process color plates and an image signal of a spot color plate, into output image signals of process color plates. The present invention also relates to a non-transitory storage medium that stores a program for performing such an image signal conversion.

2. Description of the Related Art

Heretofore, it has occasionally been practiced in the printing field to print a color image based on image signals of color plates in C, M, Y, K (hereinafter referred to as "process color plates") and a color plate in a spot color (hereinafter referred to as a "spot color plate"). In this case, on condition a printing press that is unable to perform spot color printing is used to print the color image, then since the printing press is incompatible with the image signals, it is necessary to convert input image signals, which are made up of process color plates and a spot color plate, into output image signals made up of process color plates.

Generally, information concerning a spot color (hereinafter referred to as "spot color information") is stored in association with the type of output profile that is suitable for a printing press. Therefore, since the output profile is updated in a case where an output device is calibrated, the output profile is changed from the inherent definition of the spot color, thereby resulting in a reduction in the reproduction accuracy of the spot color. In view of this problem, various processes have been proposed for achieving consistency between spot color information and output profiles.

Japanese Patent No. 4803048 discloses an apparatus, etc., in which, on condition it is judged that an output profile (color conversion table) is changed, the device-dependent value of a spot color also is changed based on the color conversion table.

Japanese Laid-Open Patent Publication No. 2010-011048 reveals an apparatus, which converts device-dependent color values on a reference medium into device-dependent color values on a new medium, using output profiles on the reference medium and the new medium.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to the apparatus, etc., disclosed in Japanese Patent No. 4803048 and Japanese Laid-Open Patent Publication No. 2010-011048, however, each time that an output profile is updated, all of the spot color information needs to be updated as a whole, after having referred to each spot color information item that is related to the output profile. Therefore, management of data has been quite tedious and time-consuming.

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The present invention has been made with a view toward solving the above problems. It is an object of the present invention to provide a color conversion processing apparatus, a color conversion processing method, and a non-transitory storage medium, which are capable of maintaining the reproduction accuracy of a spot color while data management is easily performed on the spot color information.

According to the present invention, a color conversion processing apparatus is provided for converting input image signals, which include image signals of process color plates and an image signal of a spot color plate, into output image signals of process color plates. The color conversion processing apparatus comprises a spot color information acquirer configured to acquire spot color information, which is capable of defining a spot color with device-dependent color values, a profile acquirer configured to acquire a reference profile representing a device link profile at a reference time at which the spot color is defined, and an updated profile, which is defined by the reference profile updated after the reference time, a first color converter configured to convert the image signal of the spot color plate into a first image signal of a process color plate, using the spot color information acquired by the spot color information acquirer, and a second color converter configured to convert the first image signal, which has been converted by the first color converter, into a second image signal of a process color plate by having the reference profile and the updated profile, which are acquired by the profile acquirer, act successively thereon.

The first color converter uses the spot color information. The second color converter does not use the spot color information, but has the reference profile and the updated profile act successively on the first image signal. Moreover, the first color converter and the second color converter are separate from each other. Consequently, updated results of profiles can appropriately be reflected even though the same spot color information is used. Thus, the color reproduction accuracy of the spot colors can be maintained while data management is easily performed on the spot color information.

The color conversion processing apparatus preferably further comprises a process color converter configured to convert the image signals of the process color plates into third image signals of process color plates, by having the updated profile act thereon, and a signal adder configured to add the second image signal, which has been converted by the second color converter, to the third image signals, which have been converted by the process color converter, in order to obtain the output image signals.

The spot color information acquirer preferably acquires as the spot color information device-independent color values of the spot color and an output profile which is used in generating the reference profile. Alternatively, the spot color information acquirer preferably acquires as the spot color information device-dependent color values of the spot color.

According to the present invention, there also is provided a color conversion processing method for converting input image signals, which include image signals of process color plates and an image signal of a spot color plate, into output image signals of process color plates, the color conversion processing method enabling a computer to perform the steps of acquiring spot color information, which is capable of defining a spot color with device-dependent color values, acquiring a reference profile representing a device link profile at a reference time at which the spot color is defined, and an updated profile, which is defined by the reference profile updated after the reference time, converting the

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image signal of the spot color plate into a first image signal of a process color plate, using the acquired spot color information, and converting the converted first image signal into a second image signal of a process color plate by having the acquired reference profile and the acquired updated profile act successively thereon.

According to the present invention, there further is provided a non-transitory storage medium storing a color conversion processing program for converting input image signals, which include image signals of process color plates and an image signal of a spot color plate, into output image signals of process color plates, the color conversion processing program enabling a computer to perform the steps of acquiring spot color information, which is capable of defining a spot color with device-dependent color values, acquiring a reference profile representing a device link profile at a reference time at which the spot color is defined, and an updated profile, which is defined by the reference profile updated after the reference time, converting the image signal of the spot color plate into a first image signal of a process color plate, using the acquired spot color information, and converting the converted first image signal into a second image signal of a process color plate by having the acquired reference profile and the acquired updated profile act successively thereon.

With the color conversion processing apparatus, the color conversion processing method, and the non-transitory storage medium according to the present invention, a first color conversion process uses the spot color information, and a second color conversion process does not use the spot color information but has the reference profile and the updated profile act successively on the first image signal. Moreover, the first color conversion process and the second color conversion process are separate from each other. Consequently, updated results of profiles can appropriately be reflected, even though the same spot color information is used. Thus, the color reproduction accuracy of the spot colors can be maintained while data management is easily performed on the spot color information.

The above and other objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent from the following description when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which a preferred embodiment of the present invention is shown by way of illustrative example.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is an overall block diagram of a print production system incorporating a color conversion processing apparatus according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2A is an enlarged fragmentary view of a print shown in FIG. 1;

FIG. 2B is a diagram showing a design example of the colors of color patches shown in FIG. 2A;

FIG. 3 is an electric block diagram of the color conversion processing apparatus shown in FIG. 1;

FIG. 4 is a flowchart of a first operation sequence in relation to management of profile data;

FIG. 5A is a schematic block diagram showing a data process flow of a profile generator shown in FIG. 3;

FIG. 5B is a schematic block diagram showing a data process flow of a profile updater shown in FIG. 3;

FIG. 6 is a flowchart of a second operation sequence in relation to a printing process; and

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FIG. 7 is a detailed block diagram of a color conversion processor shown in FIG. 3.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

A color conversion processing method according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention, in relation to a color conversion processing apparatus and a non-transitory storage medium that stores a color conversion processing program for carrying out the color conversion processing method, will be described in detail below with reference to the accompanying drawings.

[Overall Configuration of Print Production System 10]

FIG. 1 is an overall block diagram of a print production system 10 incorporating a color conversion processing apparatus 12 according to an embodiment of the present invention.

As shown in FIG. 1, the print production system 10 basically includes, in addition to the color conversion processing apparatus 12, a printing apparatus 14, a DTP (Desktop Publishing) apparatus 16, an imposing apparatus 17, and a database server 18. The color conversion processing apparatus 12, the DTP apparatus 16, the imposing apparatus 17, and the database server 18 are electrically connected to each other through a wired or wireless link.

The color conversion processing apparatus 12 converts image signals input from an external apparatus (hereinafter referred to as "input image signals") into image signals suitable for printing by the printing apparatus 14 (hereinafter referred to as "output image signals"). The color conversion processing apparatus 12 outputs the converted image signals as output data to the printing apparatus 14. The input image signals are composed of image signals representing process color plates and a spot color plate. The process color plates imply four color plates (C, M, Y, K) or three color plates (C, M, Y), whereas the spot color plate implies a color plate (e.g., green or violet) that differs from the process colors.

A colorimeter 20 for measuring color values of an object to be measured is connected to the color conversion processing apparatus 12. The color values include not only tristimulus values X, Y, Z, coordinate values L*, a*, b* of a uniform color space, or the like, but also include characteristics of optical physical values with respect to wavelengths, e.g., a spectral radiation distribution, a spectral sensitivity distribution, a spectral reflectance, or a spectral transmittance. The color values, which are acquired by the colorimeter 20, may hereinafter be referred to as "colorimetric values".

The printing apparatus 14 is connected electrically to the color conversion processing apparatus 12 through a serial interface such as a USB (Universal Serial Bus) cable, an IEEE1394 cable, an Ethernet (registered trademark) cable, a wireless network, or the like, or a parallel interface such as a Centronics cable.

Based on output data supplied from the color conversion processing apparatus 12, the printing apparatus 14 produces a print 24 comprising a print medium 22 with an image formed thereon. The print medium 22 may comprise a paper medium such as synthetic paper, thick paper, aluminum-evaporated paper, or the like, a resin medium such as vinyl chloride, PET (polyethylene terephthalate), or the like, or tarpaulin paper, metal sheeting, or the like.

On condition the printing apparatus 14 comprises a proofer, then the printing apparatus 14 may comprise a DDCP (Direct Digital Color Proofer), an ink jet color

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proofer, a low-resolution color laser printer (electrophotographic printer), an ink jet printer, or the like.

On condition the printing apparatus **14** comprises a letterpress, then the printing apparatus **14** applies inks to the print medium **22** through printing plates and intermediate transfer members, not shown, thereby producing the print **24** with an image on the print medium **22**.

On condition the printing apparatus **14** comprises a digital printer, then the printing apparatus **14** can produce the print **24** directly without the intermediary of printing plates. The digital printer may comprise an ink jet printer, a wide-format printer, an ink jet color proofer, a color laser printer, or the like.

The print **24** that has been produced by the printing apparatus **14** includes at least a finished area **26**, which remains as an actual image area after marginal edge areas are cropped, and a control strip **28**, which is disposed in one of the marginal edge areas to be cropped.

The printing apparatus **14** includes a colorimetric sensor **30** for measuring color values of an object to be measured. The colorimetric sensor **30** has a detection surface, not shown, which faces toward an image forming surface (where the finished area **26** is present) of the print medium **22**. The printing apparatus **14** with the colorimetric sensor **30** is capable of colorimetrically measuring colors of an image, e.g., the control strip **28**, which is formed on the print medium **22**, as the print medium **22** is being transported through the printing apparatus **14** by a non-illustrated transporting mechanism. Alternatively, the printing apparatus **14** may be free of the colorimetric sensor **30**, and the colors of the image may be measured colorimetrically by the colorimeter **20**.

The DTP apparatus **16** is an apparatus for performing a preflight process on content data made up of characters, figures, pictures, photographs, etc., and generating data of each page (page data) from the content data. The imposing apparatus **17** is an apparatus for performing an imposing process depending on a designated binding process or a sheet folding process, while referring to tag information of a job ticket, e.g., a JDF (Job Definition Format) file.

The database server **18** is a server apparatus for storing various data with respect to work flows. For example, the database server **18** may store content data, output data (e.g., platemaking data, printing plate data, or proofreading data), job tickets, e.g., JDF (Job Definition Format) files, color profiles, and spot color information, etc.

As shown in FIG. 1, the database server **18** includes a database of color profiles (referred to simply as "profiles") (hereinafter referred to as a "profile DB **32**") and a database of spot color information (hereinafter referred to as a "spot color information DB **34**").

[Layout of Print **24**]

FIG. 2A is an enlarged fragmentary view of the print **24** in FIG. 1. As shown in FIG. 2A, the control strip **28** on a left-side marginal edge area of the print medium **22** comprises a plurality of identically shaped color patches **36a** through **36i** of different colors. At least nine color patches **36a** through **36i** are shown in the drawing. The color patches **36a** through **36i** are arrayed vertically without gaps therebetween along the direction in which the print medium **22** is transported.

FIG. 2B is a diagram showing a design example of the colors of the color patches **36a** through **36i** shown FIG. 2A. FIG. 2B shows reference values prescribed according to ISO12647-2. For example, the color patch **36a** has reference values $L^*=93$, $a^*=0$, $b^*=-3$ with respect to an unprinted area

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(paper), and the color patch **36f** has reference values $L^*=47$, $a^*=66$, $b^*=50$ with respect to a secondary color in M, Y (M+Y).

Preferably, color values are used as reference values that do not depend on the input/output apparatus (so-called device-independent color values). More specifically, a color system such as HSV (Hue-Saturation-Value), HLS (Hue-Lightness-Saturation), CIELAB, CIELUV, XYZ, or the like may be used as a color system for representing device-independent color values.

[Block Representation of Color Conversion Processing Apparatus **12**]

FIG. 3 is an electric block diagram of the color conversion processing apparatus **12** shown in FIG. 1. As shown in FIG. 3, the color conversion processing apparatus **12** comprises a computer, which includes a controller **40**, a communication I/F **42**, a display controller **44**, a display unit **46**, an input unit **48**, a connection I/F **50**, and a memory **52** (storage medium).

The communication I/F **42** is an interface (I/F) for sending electric signals to and receiving electric signals from an external apparatus. Via the communication I/F **42**, the color conversion processing apparatus **12** can acquire various data such as input image signals **54**, for example, from the database server **18** (FIG. 1), and can supply various data such as spot color information **60**, for example, to the database server **18**.

The display controller **44** comprises a control circuit for controlling the display unit **46** under the control of the controller **40**. More specifically, in a case where the display controller **44** outputs a display control signal to the display unit **46** via a non-illustrated interface, the display unit **46** is energized to display various images. The input unit **48** comprises various input devices including a mouse, a trackball, a keyboard, a touch sensor, etc. The display function of the display unit **46** and the input function of the input unit **48** are combined into a user interface.

The connection I/F **50** is an interface for receiving colorimetric data from the colorimeter **20**. Thus, the color conversion processing apparatus **12** can acquire colorimetric values of the control strip **28** (FIG. 2A) via the colorimeter **20**.

The memory **52** stores programs and data, which are required for the controller **40** to control various components of the color conversion processing apparatus **12**. As shown in FIG. 3, the memory **52** stores the input image signals **54**, a reference DLP **56** (reference profile), an updated DLP **58** (updated profile), and spot color information **60**. "DLP" stands for a device link profile representing a data file that includes a color conversion table for mapping from a device-dependent color space to a device-dependent color space. In FIG. 3, the spot color information **60** is composed of an output profile **61** and spot color data values **62**.

The memory **52** may comprise a computer-readable non-transitory storage medium. In this case, the computer-readable storage medium is a portable medium such as a magneto-optical disk, a ROM, a CD-ROM, a flash memory, or other non-transitory computer-readable storage medium, or a storage device such as a hard disk that is incorporated in a computer system. The storage medium may hold programs dynamically, or may hold programs for a prescribed period of time.

The controller **40** comprises a processor such as a CPU (Central Processing Unit) or the like. The controller **40** reads and executes programs stored in the memory **52** in order to perform the functions of a spot color information acquirer **64**, a DLP manager **66**, and a data processor **68**.

The spot color information acquirer **64** acquires the spot color information **60**, which is capable of defining spot colors with color values depending on input/output apparatus (hereinafter referred to as “device-dependent color values”). The spot color information **60** may be a single piece of information (a device-dependent color value itself) or a combination of pieces of information (e.g., a device-dependent color value and a profile).

The DLP manager **66** generates and updates, registers, and deletes DLPs that are used in a color conversion process. More specifically, the DLP manager **66** has a profile generator **70** for generating various profiles, a profile updater **72** for updating DLPs as necessary, and a profile acquirer **74** for acquiring various profiles that are suitable for the color conversion process.

The data processor **68** performs data processing suitable for printing on the input image signals **54**. More specifically, the data processor **68** has a color conversion processor **76** for carrying out the color conversion process using various profiles, and a rasterization processor **78** for converting a PDL (Page Description Language) format into a raster format.

[First Operation Sequence of Color Conversion Processing Apparatus **12**]

The print production system **10** according to the present embodiment is configured as described above. A first operation sequence of the print production system **10** (in particular, the color conversion processing apparatus **12**) will be described in detail below with reference to the flowchart shown in FIG. **4**. The first operation sequence refers to various operations concerned with the management of profile data.

In step **S1** of FIG. **4**, the print production system **10** generates and registers profiles. A process of generating various profiles will be described below with reference to FIG. **5A**.

As shown in FIG. **5A**, the profile generator **70** generates an output profile **61** based on a first data set **80**. The first data set **80** comprises color values regarding a color patch in a color chart, not shown. More specifically, the first data set **80** comprises device values **81** representing design values of colors of the color patch (device-dependent colors) and measured values **82** representing colorimetric values of the color patch (device-independent colors).

For generating the output profile **61**, the profile generator **70** generates color conversion tables that are used for an “A2B conversion” and a “B2A conversion” according to a known process. The “A2B conversion” corresponds to a color conversion from a device-dependent color space (A) into a device-independent color space (B), whereas the “B2A conversion” corresponds to a color conversion from a device-independent color space (B) into a device-dependent color space (A).

After the profile generator **70** has read a target profile **84** corresponding to an “input profile” from the profile DB **32**, the profile generator **70** couples the target profile **84** with the output profile **61**, thereby generating a reference DLP **56**. The reference DLP **56** includes a color conversion table that is used for an “A2A conversion”. The “A2A conversion” corresponds to a color conversion from a device-dependent color space (A) into a device-dependent color space (A).

Next, after having received an instruction to register profiles, the print production system **10** performs a process of sending and receiving data. More specifically, the color conversion processing apparatus **12** sends communication data including the reference DLP **56** and the output profile **61** through the communication I/F **42** to the database server

18. After having received the communication data, the database server **18** adds and registers the reference DLP **56** and the output profile **61**, which are included in the communication data, in the profile DB **32**.

From the standpoint of enhancing color reproduction characteristics, it may be preferable occasionally to handle profiles on input and output sides integrally as one profile (DLP), rather than handling the profiles individually. According to the present embodiment, it is assumed that a DLP is used in a case where a color conversion process is carried out.

In step **S2**, the print production system **10** registers spot color information **60** by defining a spot color with device-dependent color values. According to the present embodiment, spot color data values **62**, which represent device-independent color values (e.g., L*, a*, b* values) of a spot color, and an output profile **61**, which is used in generating a reference DLP **56**, are prepared as spot color information **60**.

Next, after having received an instruction to register the spot color information **60**, the print production system **10** performs a process of sending and receiving data. More specifically, the color conversion processing apparatus **12** sends communication data including the spot color information **60** (the spot color data values **62** and the output profile **61**) through the communication I/F **42** to the database server **18**. After having received the communication data, the database server **18** adds and registers the spot color data values **62**, which are included in the communication data, in association with the output profile **61** in the spot color information DB **34**.

In step **S3**, it is judged whether or not it is necessary to update the DLP (including the reference DLP **56**). This judgment may be made either by one of the components of the print production system **10**, or by the operator as a user of the print production system **10**.

For example, the DLP manager **66** acquires colorimetric values of the control strip **28** on the print **24** via the colorimeter **20** or the colorimetric sensor **30**, evaluates color reproduction characteristics according to prescribed standards, and judges whether or not the DLP needs to be updated. The DLP manager **66** may judge whether or not the DLP needs to be updated in response to a manual action performed by the operator on the input unit **48**.

On condition it is judged that it is not necessary to update the DLP (step **S3**: NO), then step **S3** is looped to continue managing and operating the DLP. On condition it is judged that it is necessary to update the DLP (step **S3**: YES), then the control proceeds to step **S4**.

In step **S4**, the print production system **10** updates the DLP, which was judged to require updating in step **S3**. A process of updating the DLP will be described below with reference to FIG. **5B**.

As shown in FIG. **5B**, the profile updater **72** updates the reference DLP **56** based on a second data set **90**. The second data set **90** comprises color values in relation to the color patches **36a** through **36i** of the control strip **28** (FIG. **2A**). More specifically, the second data set **90** comprises reference values **91** representing reference values of colors of the color patches **36a** (device-independent colors), etc., and measured values **92** representing colorimetric values of the color patches **36a** (device-independent colors), etc.

For updating the reference DLP **56**, the profile updater **72** corrects the color conversion table that is used for the “A2A conversion”. Thereafter, the corrected DLP (hereinafter referred to as an “updated DLP **58**”) can be used to compensate for a reduction in color reproduction accuracy (a

deviation of the measured values **92** from the reference values **91**), which is caused by time-dependent changes in the state of the printing apparatus **14**.

As shown in FIG. 5B, the profile updater **72** corrects the reference DLP **56** and outputs the updated DLP **58**. The example shown in FIG. 5B represents a data process flow of a first updating event. In second and subsequent updating events, the profile updater **72** corrects the updated DLP **58** and outputs a new updated DLP **58**.

In step S5, it is judged whether or not the current registration of profiles should be erased. Similar to step S3, this judgment may be made either by one of the components of the print production system **10**, or by the operator as a user of the print production system **10**.

On condition it is judged that the current registration of profiles should not be erased (step S5: NO), then the control returns to step S3, and steps S3 through S5 are repeated successively. On condition it is judged that the current registration of profiles should be erased (step S5: YES), then the control proceeds to step S6.

In step S6, the print production system **10** erases the registration of profiles. More specifically, the color conversion processing apparatus **12** erases the reference DLP **56**, the updated DLP **58**, and the spot color information **60**, which are stored in the memory **52**. Alternatively, the color conversion processing apparatus **12** may erase the data registered in the profile DB **32** or the spot color information DB **34**. At this time, the first operation sequence of the print production system **10** (in particular, the color conversion processing apparatus **12**) is brought to an end.

[Second Operation Sequence of Color Conversion Processing Apparatus **12**]

A second operation sequence of the print production system **10** (in particular, the color conversion processing apparatus **12**) will be described in detail below with reference to the flowchart shown in FIG. 6. The second operation sequence refers to various operations concerned with a printing process, in particular a color conversion process, for printing the print **24**.

In step S11, the color conversion processing apparatus **12** judges whether or not an instruction has been issued for starting the printing process. On condition there is no instruction (step S11: NO), then the color conversion processing apparatus **12** loops step S11 until it receives an instruction. On condition there is an instruction (step S11: YES), then the color conversion processing apparatus **12** acquires input image signals **54** that are used in the printing process. Control then proceeds to step S12.

In step S12, the spot color information acquirer **64** acquires spot color information **60**, which is capable of defining a spot color with device-dependent color values. The spot color information acquirer **64** may acquire spot color information **60** related to the input image signals **54**, or may download spot color information **60** from the spot color information DB **34**, using ancillary information of the input image signals **54** as a clue.

In step S13, the profile acquirer **74** acquires various profiles that are used in the color conversion process. The profile acquirer **74** acquires DLPs that are suitable for the printing apparatus **14**. More specifically, the profile acquirer **74** acquires a reference DLP **56** at a reference time at which the spot color is defined, and a reference DLP updated after the reference time (stated otherwise, an updated DLP **58**).

In steps S14 through S17, the color conversion processor **76** obtains output image signals **100** by successively performing predetermined data processing steps. A specific

example of the color conversion process will be described in detail below with reference to FIG. 7.

FIG. 7 is a detailed block diagram of the color conversion processor **76** shown in FIG. 3. The color conversion processor **76** converts input image signals **54** into output image signals **100** using color conversion information including the profiles. The input image signals **54** are composed of image signals **102** of process color plates and an image signal **104** of a spot color plate. The output image signals **100** are composed of image signals of process color plates.

In FIG. 7, color reproduction characteristics represented by the image signals are denoted by symbols "A1", "A2", "A3", and "B2" for illustrative purposes. The symbols "A1", "A2", and "A3" represent device-dependent color spaces specified respectively by the target profile **84**, the reference DLP **56**, and the updated DLP **58**. The symbol "B2" represents a device-independent color space specified by the reference DLP **56**.

In step S14 of FIG. 6, a process color converter **106** performs a color conversion process (A2A conversion) on the image signals **102** of the process color plates by having the updated DLP **58** act thereon. By performing the color conversion process, the process color converter **106** obtains image signals of process color plates (hereinafter referred to as "third image signals **102c**"), which are suitable for the state (A3) of the printing apparatus **14** at the present time.

In step S15 of FIG. 6, a first color converter **108** performs a first color conversion process (A2A conversion) on the image signal **104** of the spot color plate using the spot color information **60**. The first color conversion process comprises [1] an "A1→B2" conversion based on the spot color data values **62** and [2] a "B2→A2" conversion based on the output profile **61**, which are successively coupled together. By performing the first color conversion process, the first color converter **108** obtains an image signal of a process color plate (hereinafter referred to as "first image signal **104a**"), which is suitable for the state (A2) of the printing apparatus **14** at the reference time.

In step S16 of FIG. 6, a second color converter **110** performs a second color conversion process (A2A conversion) on the first image signal **104a** of the process color plate, by having the reference DLP **56** and the updated DLP **58** act successively thereon. The second color conversion process comprises [1] an "A2→A1" conversion based on the reference DLP **56** and [2] an "A1→A3" conversion based on the updated DLP **58**, which are successively coupled together. By performing the second color conversion process, the second color converter **110** obtains an image signal of a process color plate (hereinafter referred to as "second image signal **104b**"), which is suitable for the state (A3) of the printing apparatus **14** at the present time.

In step S17 of FIG. 6, a signal adder **112** adds and couples the second image signal **104b**, which were converted by the second color converter **110**, to the third image signals **102c**, which were converted by the process color converter **106**. In this manner, the color conversion processor **76** obtains the output image signals **100**.

In step S18, the printing process is carried out based on the output image signals **100**, which were converted in color in step S17. Prior to the printing process, the rasterization processor **78** performs a rasterization process that is suitable for the printing apparatus **14** on the output image signals **100**, so as to generate raster data, and supplies the generated raster data to the printing apparatus **14**. Then, based on the raster data, the printing apparatus **14** produces a desired print **24**.

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At this time, the second operation sequence of the print production system 10 (in particular, the color conversion processing apparatus 12) is brought to an end. Consequently, the printing apparatus 14, which is incompatible with spot color printing, e.g., a proofer, is capable of realizing color reproduction characteristics that are suitable for the state of the printing apparatus 14 at the present time, in substantially the same fashion as an apparatus that is compatible with spot color printing.

Advantages of the Present Embodiment

As described above, the color conversion processing apparatus 12 according to the present embodiment converts input image signals 54, which are composed of image signals 102 of process color plates and an image signal 104 of a spot color plate, into output image signals 100 of process color plates.

The color conversion processing apparatus 12 includes the spot color information acquirer 64 for acquiring spot color information 60, which is capable of defining a spot color with device-dependent color values, the profile acquirer 74 for acquiring a reference DLP 56 at a reference time at which the spot color is defined, and an updated DLP 58, which is defined by the reference DLP 56 updated after the reference time, the first color converter 108 for converting an image signal 104 of a spot color plate into a first image signal 104a of a process color plate, using the spot color information 60, and the second color converter 110 for converting the first image signal 104a into a second image signal 104b of a process color plate by having the reference DLP 56 and the updated DLP 58 act successively thereon.

The first color conversion process, which uses the spot color information 60, is separate from the second color conversion process, which does not use the spot color information 60 but includes the reference DLP 56 and the updated DLP 58 that act successively on the first image signal 104a. Consequently, updated results of profiles can appropriately be reflected, even though the same spot color information 60 is used. Thus, the color reproduction accuracy of spot colors can be maintained while data management is easily performed on the spot color information 60.

SUPPLEMENTARY REMARKS

The present invention is not limited to the above embodiment, and the present embodiment can freely be changed or modified without departing from the scope of the invention.

According to the present embodiment, the spot color information acquirer 64 acquires as the spot color information 60 device-independent color values of a spot color (spot color data values 62) and the output profile 61 that is used for generating the reference DLP 56. However, the present invention is not limited to acquisition of the output profile 61 in this manner. For example, as the spot color information 60, the spot color information acquirer 64 may acquire device-dependent color values of a spot color (e.g., L*, a*, b* values).

What is claimed is:

1. A color conversion processing and printing apparatus for converting input image signals, which include image signals of process color plates and an image signal of a spot color plate, into output image signals of process color plates for printing an image, said apparatus comprising:

a spot color information acquirer configured to acquire spot color information, which is capable of defining a spot color with device-dependent color values;

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a profile acquirer configured to acquire a reference profile representing a device link profile at a reference time at which the spot color is defined, and an updated profile, which is defined by the reference profile updated after the reference time;

a first color converter configured to convert the image signal of the spot color plate into a first image signal of a process color plate, using the spot color information acquired by the spot color information acquirer;

a second color converter configured to convert the first image signal, which has been converted by the first color converter, into a second image signal of a process color plate, by having the reference profile and the updated profile, which are acquired by the profile acquirer, act successively thereon; and

a printer configured to output a color print using an amount of ink applied to an output medium, the amount of ink being based on the second image signal.

2. The color conversion processing apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

a process color converter configured to convert the image signals of the process color plates into third image signals of process color plates, by having the updated profile act thereon; and

a signal adder configured to add the second image signal, which has been converted by the second color converter, to the third image signals, which have been converted by the process color converter, in order to obtain the output image signals.

3. The color conversion processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the spot color information acquirer acquires as the spot color information device-independent color values of the spot color and an output profile which is used in generating the reference profile.

4. The color conversion processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the spot color information acquirer acquires as the spot color information device-dependent color values of the spot color.

5. A color conversion processing method for converting input image signals, which include image signals of process color plates and an image signal of a spot color plate, into output image signals of process color plates for printing a color image, the color conversion processing method comprising:

using one or more computers to performs steps of:

acquiring spot color information, which is capable of defining a spot color with device-dependent color values;

acquiring a reference profile representing a device link profile at a reference time at which the spot color is defined, and an updated profile, which is defined by the reference profile updated after the reference time;

converting the image signal of the spot color plate into a first image signal of a process color plate, using the acquired spot color information;

converting the converted first image signal into a second image signal representative of color of a process color plate by having the acquired reference profile and the acquired updated profile act successively thereon; and

printing a color output image using an amount of ink applied on an output medium, the amount of ink being based on the second image signal.

6. The method of claim 5 further comprising outputting the color output image using an ink amount corresponding to the second image signal representative of color of the process color plate, said ink amount being applied to a printing plate.

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7. A non-transitory computer readable storage medium storing a color conversion processing program for converting input image signals, which include image signals of process color plates and an image signal of a spot color plate, into output image signals of process color plates for printing a color image, the color conversion processing program enabling a computer to perform the steps of:

acquiring spot color information, which is capable of defining a spot color with device-dependent color values;

acquiring a reference profile representing a device link profile at a reference time at which the spot color is defined, and an updated profile, which is defined by the reference profile updated after the reference time;

converting the image signal of the spot color plate into a first image signal of a process color plate, using the acquired spot color information;

converting the converted first image signal into a second image signal of a process color plate by having the acquired reference profile and the acquired updated profile act successively thereon; and

printing a color output image using an amount of ink applied on an output medium, the amount of ink being based on the second image signal.

8. A color conversion processing apparatus for converting input image signals, which include image signals of process color plates and an image signal of a spot color plate, into output image signals of process color plates, comprising:

a spot color information acquirer configured to acquire spot color information, which is capable of defining a spot color with device-dependent color values, the spot color information including

a spot color data value configured to represent a device-independent color value of the spot color, and

an output profile configured to be used in generating a reference profile representing a device link profile at a reference time at which the spot color is defined;

a profile acquirer configured to acquire the reference profile, and an updated profile, which is defined by the reference profile updated after the reference time;

a first color converter configured to convert the image signal of the spot color plate into a first image signal of a process color plate, having the spot color data value and the output profile acquired by the spot color information acquirer act successively; and

a second color converter configured to convert the first image signal, which has been converted by the first color converter, into a second image signal of a process color plate, by performing a color conversion process that includes successively coupling a color conversion based on the reference profile which are acquired by the profile acquirer and a color conversion based on the acquired updated profile, the second image signal determining an amount of ink to be applied to an output medium.

9. A color conversion processing method for converting input image signals, which include image signals of process color plates and an image signal of a spot color plate, into

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output image signals of process color plates, the color conversion processing method enabling a computer to perform the steps of:

acquiring spot color information, which is capable of defining a spot color with device-dependent color values, the spot color information including

a spot color data value configured to represent a device-independent color value of the spot color, and

an output profile configured to be used in generating a reference profile representing a device link profile at a reference time at which the spot color is defined;

acquiring the reference profile, and an updated profile, which is defined by the reference profile updated after the reference time;

converting the image signal of the spot color plate into a first image signal of a process color plate, having the acquired spot color data value and the output profile act successively; and

converting the converted first image signal into a second image signal of a process color plate by performing a color conversion process that includes successively coupling a color conversion based on the acquired reference profile and a color conversion based on the acquired updated profile, the second image signal determining an amount of ink to be applied to an output medium.

10. A non-transitory storage medium storing a color conversion processing program for converting input image signals, which include image signals of process color plates and an image signal of a spot color plate, into output image signals of process color plates, the color conversion processing program enabling a computer to perform the steps of:

acquiring spot color information, which is capable of defining a spot color with device-dependent color values, the spot color information including

a spot color data value configured to represent a device-independent color value of the spot color, and

an output profile configured to be used in generating a reference profile representing a device link profile at a reference time at which the spot color is defined;

acquiring the reference profile, and an updated profile, which is defined by the reference profile updated after the reference time;

converting the image signal of the spot color plate into a first image signal of a process color plate, having the acquired spot color data value and the output profile act successively; and

converting the converted first image signal into a second image signal of a process color plate by performing a color conversion process that includes successively coupling a color conversion based the acquired reference profile and a color conversion based on the acquired updated profile, the second image signal determining an amount of ink to be applied to an output medium.

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